BAKERSFIELD AND KERN ELECTRIC RAILWAY

HISTORICAL DATA (1924)

The tradition and folk lore of the community indicate that the Bakersfield and Kern Electric Railway had it's inception at the time the S. P. Railroad, after a disagreement with the people of the then village of Bakersfield, had moved some two miles to the Eastward and established a depot on the desert and named it Kern.

Two miles of mud or dust, depending upon the season, separated the traveler from any semblance of hospitality and demand soon inspired some buccanneering stage driver to meet the once a day train and charge the new comer $1.00 for the ride across the flat to the general vicinity of what is now designated as 19th and Chester Ave., Bakersfield. This was more or less of an individual business until some years later, when in 1892 a horse car line was built between the S. P. depot in Kern and the Santa Fe depot in Bakersfield, the fare on this line being set at .25, following which a transportation war raged between the stages and the horse cars, resulting in the superiority of rails over roads being demonstrated to the entire satisfaction of the pioneers.

With the development of hydrelectric power in the late 90's by the Power Development Co, the Bakersfield and Kern Electric Railway became a possibility, accordingly on March 24, 1900 the corporation was launched by the following: H. A. Blodget
C. N. Beal
C. R. Eager
S. B. Cushing
F. T. Whorff

Bonds to the extent of $100,000 were voted in June 1900 to build the necessary barn, trackage, overhead and generating machinery and to purchase rolling stock. Construction work was undertaken immediately and a Car Barn at Union Ave. and 19th St, 100' by 50' was erected of wood and corrugated iron construction. The 16 lb. horse car rail was replaced by 36 lb. girder rail which had seen service in Los Angeles and Sydney, Australia before being laid. in Bakersfield between the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe depots. This one line which was single track comprised the entire system.

Four single truck cars, seating 24 passengers each, built by C.A. Hammond, San Francisco, mounted on Brill 21 E trucks, constituted the equipment, All cars were equipped with a single 25 horse power motor.

D. C. Current at 550 volts was supplied by a 250 K W G E synchronous rotary converter 330 Volts A C - 550 D.C. with the necessary and only necessary switchboard equipment. 1/0 round trolley with no feeders was used in the distribution and overhead system.

Among the first motormen and conductors were Ed. Millard, Tom Scott Jr. John Canaday and Jim Reed, who are now rancher, lawyer, rancher and Justice of the Peace, respectively.

Officers and executors were, H. A. Blodget, President, C. N. Beal Vice President and Gen'l Manager, Jas. Goodwin, Ass't Gen'l Manager and Frank Whorff, Superintendent.

Early in 1902 three double truck, 2 motor cars, seating 40 passengers were ordered from C. Hammond, San Francisco. These cars were semi convertible of special design by E. M. Beal, Sup't. who had succeeded Frank Whorff as Sup't. Jas. Goodwin succeeded C. N. Beal as Gen'l Manager during this year also;

The cars 5, 6 and 7, previously referred to had sufficient step and standing room to give them a rush hour capacity of 175 passengers and in those days were frequently fully loaded.

387-25

In 1903 an expansion program was carried out and the following lines were built: West 19th from F to Oak St. and South on Oak to 17th - single track with turnout at Cedar Street.

Chester Ave. Single track South on Chester Ave to 8th. East on 8th to P St. North on P St to 11th St. and West on 11th St. to Chester Ave. A line was also constructed North on Chester Ave from 19th to 24th, East on 24th to K St. and North on K St to 28th St.

H Street. Single track South on H St. to California Ave. West on California to F St and North on F St. to and across the Santa Fe Track to connect with the existing line at the Santa Fe Depot.

All extensions were laid with 50 # resawed T Rail. Chester Ave. line paved from 15th to 21st Street.

It was during this year that Recreation Park was laid out and a grandstand seating 3500 people constructed. The park being approximately 600 feet square, surrounded by a 10' board fence.

From 1903 to 1908 the 36 lb. rail which had been laid between the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Depots gave continual trouble, breaking frequently, spreading and derailing cars, with consequent delays.

Changes in Personnel during this period were: - E.M. Beal resigned as general Supt. in 1906 - succeeded by Jim Baker. Jim Reed who had been track foreman made Supt. of Railway. Jas. Goodwin, General Manager died on Nov. 17th, 1908, and Harry Jastro succeeded him, effective Jan. 1, 1909.

Early in 1909 J. E. Hullen of the Sacramento Gas & Electric Co. rebuilt the original line from the Santa Fe to the Southern Pacific depots, laying a single track of 60 # T rail with the exception of that portion of the line between F St and N St on 19th which was double track 87# grooved rail paved in.

New special work was placed where necessary throughout the system. The H St. line was not connected up at 19th St., being accessible only from the F St.

A ~~60~~ 50 #T Rail double track was also laid on Oak St. to facilitate operation of cars at the ball park (Recreation). A new 300 K. W. Induction Motor Generator was purchased and installed at the P. T & L Sub station at 20th and H Sts to take care of the additional power requirements of the system - the 250 K W Rotary Converter remaining as emergency equipment. Cars 8 and 9 - 40 feet, 2 motor (G E 800) double truck equipments were purchased early in 1910 to provide additional rolling stock for the system. Construction of these extensions were not entirely completed, there being some minor adjustments and replacements, until July 1910, when the entire property of the Power Transit and Light Co, which included the Bakersfield Gas and Electric Co and the Bakersfield and Kern Electric Railway was purchased by the San Joaquin Light & Power Corporation.

The Executive Personnel of the property acquired being:

Harry Jastro - Manager
Jim Baker - General Supt.
Jim Reed - Supt. Railway Dept.

Jim Reed resigned, effective Sept. 1st and J. F. Turner of the Fresno Traction Co. succeeded him. Having severed his connection with the Fresno Traction Co. on August 1st. and coming to Bakersfield to acquaint himself with the property.

Jim Baker who had been General Supt. was made Supt. of Power and Gas on Sept. 1st, J. F. Turner assuming full charge of the railway. V. N. Mickelberry was placed in charge of the mechanical department effective Sept. 1st. 1910.

The equipment acquired with the property consisted of:

3 - 7	ton	24	passenger,	single	truck	cars
1 - 7	"	24	"	"	"	(Wrecked)
3 -12	"	40	"	double	"	"
2 -13	"	40	"	"	"	"

Spare armatures and car wheels sufficient to maintain the equipment also acquired. Shop equipment consisted of a one ton chain block, a small hand drill, a few hammers, chissels and wrenches.

Plans for the reconstruction and re-equipping were made immediately following the acquisition of the property and in the fall of 1911 active work began.

The track construction necessitated the installation of a rock crusher and screening plant on the bluffs near Kern River with a capacity of 20 cu yds per hour to insure an ample supply of ballast for the road bed. At the peak of construction activity there were 40 1 yd. wagons, 2 - 2 yd wagons and 2 - 4 yd. trucks moving ballast. Some 1500 tons of new steel rail exclusive of special work was required as 8½ miles of the new rail laid was 114 lb. steel and approximately 1 mile 72 lb. Huntington high Tee Rail. Approximately 16000 redwood ties were required.

Alex Maneely a track builder of wide experinece had charge of track construction, with a track crew of some 275 men. Working concurrently with the track gang the trolley crew in charge of C. E. Spencer carried on the job of building the overhead distribution system, replacing practically all of the old construction, stringing new 2/0 grooved trolley in place of the 1/0 round which had been in service and adding some additional 4/0 feeder lines. Some 10½ miles of new trolley wire being required and several tons of 1/4", 5/16" and 3/8" messenger wire. "Erico" brazed bonds were installed at all rail joints by R. Day of the Fresno Traction Co.

Early in February 1912 a shipment of 6 California type 42', 40 passenger double truck, 2 motor double end 17 ton cars which had been ordered in the early fall of 1911 were received and the work of placing the equipment on them begun on Feb. 15th. R. B. Smith, pipe fitter and W. T. Brown, electrician, both of the Los Angeles Railway Co. were brought to Bakersfield to take care of the work in their respective crafts, they with a carpenter, one laborer and the barn forman constituted the crew which placed the control, brake, and motive equipment on the cars which had been shipped stripped. The first car was placed in operation March 4th 1912 and the last May 3rd. Construction work had been practically completed by this date and the city of Bakersfield had for the first time a first class street car system, equal to any in the U. S. in quality if not in size.

A temporary car shed, pit, and tracks had been constructed on company property immediately North of Recreation Park and on May 4th all cars were moved to this location and the car barn at 19th and Union Ave. was abandoned. Capital Investment of this date $626,000.00

With the close of construction work in May 1910 activities were confined strictly to operation and no changes or improvements of any kind were made until early in 1914 when a temporary paint shop was erected at Recreation Park and all rail equipment painted by A. Cuzen Company, painter and helper who spent seven months in Bakersfield in this work.

In 1915 a swarm of "Jitneys" infested Bakersfield and entered into competition with the Street Railway. At the peak of this pestilence when some 45 touring cars of various makes and sizes were operating the receipts of the railway dropped to $60.00 per day. An election held on October 3rd. 1915 placed restrictions and regulations upon this type of public conveyance and on October 4th at 11:00 A.M. the Bakersfield and Kern Electric Railway took up the task of transporting passengers by automobile which, so far as the records show, is the first undertaking of its kind by any street railway in California and among the first in the United States.

The first line established served the West Park district terminating at the Santa Fe depot and exchanging transfers with the car line at that point. The line was approximately one mile in length and the receipts for the first day were 60 cents and reached $6.85 per day of 18 hours on October 31st. Small bus bodies with seats to accomodate seven passengers and the driver were built at the Bakersfield Steam plant and mounted upon Ford touring car chassis and on October 15th service was instituted on

Baker Street between the S. P. depot and Grace St. and on Niles St. from the S. P. depot to Williams Street. A 15 minute service was scheduled on each line and connections with street cars made at the depot with free transfer privileges. The receipts on these lines were $1.00 and .45 respectively the first day and $2.90 and $3.75 respectively on Oct. 31st.

Early in 1916, 3 Studebaker 12-passenger busses were purchased and placed in operation on the different lines, giving 7½ minutes service on Niles and Baker St. lines. In 1918 two additional busses of the same type were purchased and added to the gas equipment of the system and two of the small Fords were retired.

On July 1st 1918 J. F. Turner resigned as Supt. and V. N. Mickelberry was appointed to succeed him.

E. D. Farrow district manager resigned and D. L. Wishon succeeded him on December 1st. of this year.

During the winter months of this year a serious epidemic of influenza which over ran the entire nation, seriously affected revenue and placed 50% of the trainmen in service on the sick list.

In the spring of 1919 one bus was taken off of Niles and one off of Baker St. as the revenue did not justify the 7½ minute service.

The three Studebaker busses purchased in 1916 were retired from service and the bodies were mounted upon 3 Ford one-ton Truck Chassis which had been purchased to replace retired equipment. Other improvements during the year consisted of the removal of the crossover at 19th street West of Chester Ave. and it's replacement by the crossover removed from 19th and Cedar St.

Labor turnover among platform men during the year excessive.

During the year 1920 operating conditions began to swing back to normal with revenues fair.

On June 5, 1920 between 12:45 and 1:00 P. M. the grandstand at Recreation Park burst into flame, communicating to the temporary paint shop and thence to the park fences. The grand stand, paint shop, two street cars and 625 feet of fence was destroyed. A total damage exceeding $10,000.00. The structures destroyed were not rebuilt.

Gross receipts from operations during this year broke all previous records. The year 1921 passed without unusual occurence except that a hearing on rates and service was requested from the California State Railroad Commission in October.

The tracks on Union Ave. were removed during the summer and a spur track was built into the car barn property paralleling the 19th street frontage of same. A new crossing (one section) was ordered and installed on the South bound Chester Ave. track and the Santa Fe Main line in August to replace a section which had broken down. A Pierce Arrow 25 passenger bus added to bus equipment in Decmeber 1921.

1922 -Late in 1921 an estimate for reconstructing and enlarging the car barn at 19th and Union Ave. was approved and on Feb. 4th 1922 work begun. This project included the reconstruction of all car barn tracks and turnouts and additions to the original layout, addition to the building 20 x 36 feet. The construction of a concrete wall across the inppection pit, the building of a cement wash and work track and dother repairs and additions to the car barn and also the erection of a $6000.00 paint shop, on the property with tracks for street cars and a street entrance for busses and automobiles. Approximately 1500 yards of dirt were moved to level the yards and lay the tracks. This was the most extensive improvement and expenditure of money on any one project concerning the railway since the reconstruction of the road.

This work had been sufficiently advanced to permit of the re-occupation of the car barn on May 23rd. The construction being finished when the paint shop was completed on June 15th. Thus the property which had been abandoned on May 4th, 1922 and which in turn had served as garage, stable, garage and company warehouse and tool room was again returned to the service for which it had originally been designed, a car barn in name and in fact. 1912

The abandonment of the car shed at 19th and Oak St. and a paving project which included Oak St. made the removal of shed and tracks a necessity. This work was carried on in connection with the reconstruction of the Union Ave. property in so far as was possible. The shed being wrecked and sold and the rails and ties removed and salvaged. This was completed on July 15th. Preliminary work in the reconstruction of 470 feet of main line trackage on 19th St. between F and H Streets commenced on Oct. 15. and finished on Oct. 27th. It being deemed advisable to wait until spring to complete the work.

In response to a request during the previous year the California Railroad Commission held a hearing on rates and service of the Bakersfield and Kern Electric Railway in June 1922 and in a decision rendered in November advised among other things the elimination of first and last traps and one man operation of all equipment. Schedules were changed in conformity with this request on Feb. 22, 1923 but changes in equipment to permit one man operation was postponed until May 1, 1923.

The painting of equipment which had been postponed on account of the destruction of the paint shop by fire in June 1920, begun on Sept. 11th in the new fire proof paint shop and completed in May 1923. This equipment had not been painted since 1917.

On October 31st, two White 18 passenger busses were ordered in Los Angeles for delivery in 45 days and were received and placed in service in time to take care of the Christmas shoppers. It was during the month of December 1922 that the Railway Supts office at the car barn was remodeled to accomodate the Railway Cashier. More improvements were made and more money spent for improvements on the railway in 1922 than in any year since 1912.

1923-On January 9th 1923 the Railway Cashier occupied his office at the Car Barn and for the first time in the history of the organization all railway employees were housed and had their headquarters at the car barn. Between March 26 and April 17 the track reconstruction on which preliminary work had been done in the fall, was completed and while the paving was being done an electric switch was installed at 19th and F Sts. The latter in preparation of one man operation of the cars which had been ordered by the Railroad Commission in its decision of November 1922. Improvements and changes in equipment to enable one man to operate them safely and efficiently, completed during the Spring and on May 4th one man operation became effective on the 19th St. line. Chester Ave line and the busses having been previously operated by one man. The change to this operation on Chester Ave. being made in 1917.

Schedules of May 1st established 9 ~~minute~~ minute headway instead of the 7½ minute service previously given with two men on the main line cars, but by June 16th the original service was restored - operators having no trouble in making the scheduled time on account of a decrease in the number of passengers carried. A reduction of 8 men in operating force was accomplished by the change to one man operation. Passenger revenue during the year below normal.

1924-An application for an increase in rates filed with the California State Railroad Commission resulted in a hearing being held in Bakersfield on May 15th and a decision being rendered August 27th in which the $1.00 weekly pass, 10 cent cash fare and a token rate of 7 for .50¢ was ordered and became effective Sept. 22nd. with the result that receipts have increased something over 11% over the same months of 1923.

Early in April this year an order was placed for an 18 passenger White bus delivery being made June 29th. One Ford 12 passenger bus being retired.

Bus equipment on this date - 1 Pierce Arrow, 25 Passenger.
3 White 18 "
1 Ford 12 "

Maintenance work included the painting of all gas and electrical equipment in service.

Financial records can be best obtained in Fresno office.

Personal records of length of service not included.

V. N. Mickelberry 1924